

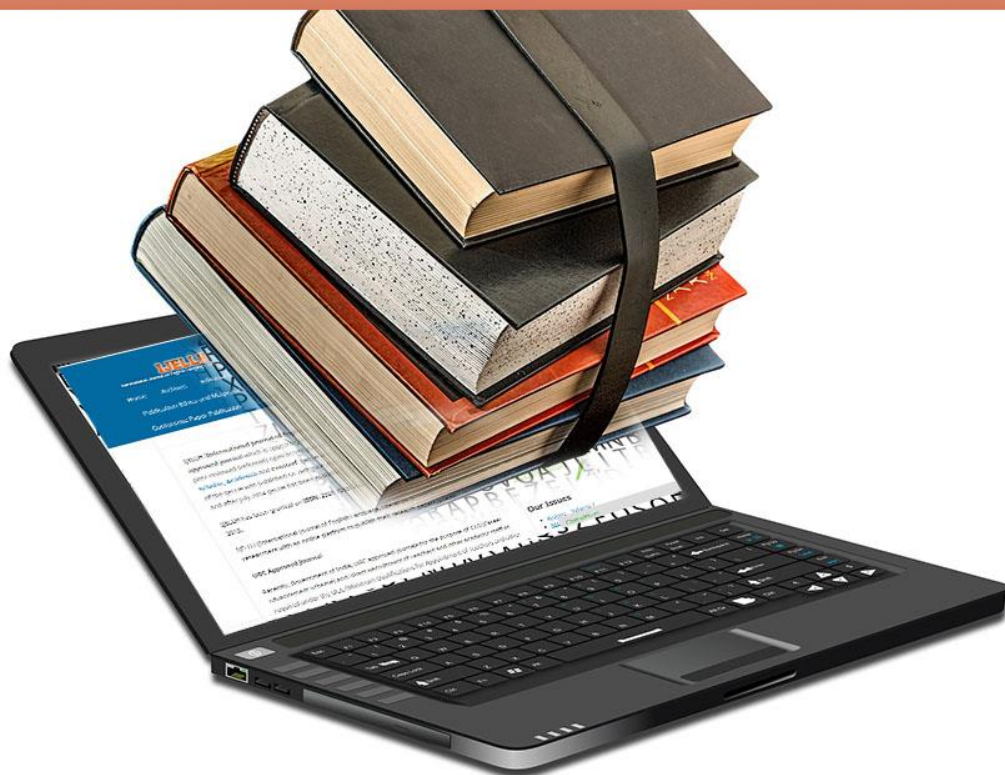
ISSN INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER

ISSN-2321-7065

IJELLH

International Journal of English Language, Literature in Humanities

Indexed, Peer Reviewed (Refereed), UGC Approved Journal



Volume 7, Issue 3, March 2019

www.ijellh.com

S. Rusi

M. A., M.Phil, Assistant Professor of English,
Sri Ramakrishna College of Arts and Science,
Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, India
srusi@srcas.ac.in

Tussle and Triumph of African American woman in strange world as depicted in *Some Sing*,
Some Cry.

Abstract

Literature is the reflection of life; it attempts to convey a perspective, mood, feeling and experience. African-American Literature is the body of literature produced in the United States by the writers of African descent. It begins with the works of late eighteenth century writers such as Phillis Wheatley. Among the themes and issues explored in this literature are African-American culture, racism, slavery, and social equality.

Ntozake Shange was born on October 18, 1948. Shange primarily focuses on women's issues such as menstruation, sexuality, childbirth, and the ever-present threat of sexual assault and violation as they affect women's lives and bodies. She writes very effectively that the people who read it felt that they have actually lived through the stories they have heard.

Some Sing, Some cry by Ntozake Shange reveals the unique voice of a strong African-American woman in modern society. The novel portrays both tussles and triumph of women's lives and how they are overcoming their struggles and sufferings.

Keywords: Tussle, Triumph, struggles, sufferings, Slavery, Racial Discrimination.

Ntozake Shange and Ifa Bayeza's *Some Sing, Some Cry* focuses on the tussles and triumph of black woman and their approach of overwhelming it. The narrative begins with the nostalgic musings of a newly emancipated slave, Betty Mayfield; she prepares to leave Sweet Tamarind, a plantation on an island off the coast of South Carolina, with her granddaughter Dora. Daughter of a slave woman and the powerful white planter who would also become Betty's own lover and the father of her three daughters, Betty is a living testament to the perverse intimacy of 'the peculiar institution'. Owned, abused, but maybe also loved by a man she calls 'Pa-lover,' (SSSC 8) Betty refuses to be ashamed of the lasting passion she feels for this 'lover and owner,' 'master and partner.' On the contrary, she is proud to belong, as she sees it, to the Mayfield family - to have been the favourite of its deceased patriarch and to have borne his children.

The day before she leaves a white man comes, which the narrator states:

A rough white man, whip and rifle in hand, had passed by a few days before, warning Betty and hers to be off the land by evening of this very day. So off they planned to be, not wanting to know another moment of the whites' wrath. The colored Mayfield were familiar with what that meant, and with no slavery to hold them back they were off to Charleston, where others awaited them. There was nothing odd about two colored women racing the rhythm of cicadas and the tides at first light, busying themselves with order, a sense of the day to come and dreams of what it might bring, yet this day felt different. (SSSC 1)

The above lines clearly show that Betty and Dora are leaving Sweet Tamarind, which was a place of their own. A white man comes with a whip and a rifle in hand, to warn them to leave the land. Both of them are unwillingly ready to leave their place, in order to safe guard their lives from the wrath of whites.

Before she leaves she goes to visit the graveyard to tell her final greeting to her husband who is dead long ago. There she remembers her past which Shange states as:

Yet they were property, like chattel or so much hog entrails, these girls, begat with joy sometimes, from power other times. Betty, the one who laid naked gaist the blond hair silken on his chest, whose legs entangled themselves with his arms and calves, have their mother re-enslaved because he, Mayfield, the planter heard something about a wench close to him aiding troublemakers to make their way north. (SSSC 6)

This shows that to white men black people were merely a property than a human being who were used only for the purpose of sensual pleasure for whites. Black woman were used by whites only to fulfill their lustful desires. Betty has three daughters namely Juliet, Blanche and Elma. Eudora is the daughter of Juliet who died when Dora was in her childhood. Betty loves her husband even when he ill-treats her. Being a mother she loved all her daughters even her grand-daughters. When Betty listens to the roadside music, she gets lost in her past which Shange says:

Betty carried a deep bronze child to the cradle by her bed with her master, Julius, who nearly crushed the child's skull when he threw the cradle over with his booted foot. "Takin' up with darkies, after all I've given you, black bitch!" His wrath willing Betty's frail body against the walls, under his feet, caught by his closed fist. (SSSC 38)

This shows how cruelly Betty's born child was beaten and treated by her own master, whom she calls her husband. It also shows their cruelty even for a born child, who is beaten up for no reason.

Dora starts to think about her days in Sweet Tamarind, she dreams about her future in Mexico and her life in there. After cleaning all the dirt in room she goes to visit the shop and roam where she is badly discriminated, and was thrown out of the shop. The shopkeeper says:

Git yo hanz offuh dat.” The store clerk had a tight nose and thin, withered lips that bespoke a natural parsimony. “It says here, ‘Purchase Plans Available.’ What do that mean?” “Nothin’ for the likes of you. That’s for white ladies, where is yo’ Miss”! “I have no Miss. I am a Dressmaker.” “Not in here you ani’t. Git yo uppity ass outta here fo I call somebody. And leave out the black! (SSSC 50)

Dora is racially discriminated in the shop, even though she is financial proper, the shop keeper is not ready to sell anything to Dora, and even he doesn’t allow her to enter into the shop. The only purpose she comes to Charleston is to fulfill her dreams but not even a shopkeeper pays an attempt for her dreams.

Dora earns lot of money and fame for her work as she is very talented, which helps her to buy a new machine for her work. As she earns fame, whites start to ask for her to make dresses, one among whites is Matilda Tilde. Dora does a good job for Tilde; even there she is harassed by an old man in Tilde’s home which Shange puts:

He leaned against the door frame and stroked her cheek with the back of his hand. “I see yo grandmammy on the docks. Sellin’ charms. Crab claw under the tongue. Where’s your charm, huh? Let me see?” When his palm graced her lips, she bit him good. The tray went flying . Green crystal glass and sprigs of mint crashed to the floor. (SSSC 90)

Dora eventually becomes a successful dressmaker, ultimately resulting in working for the white people. Still she befalls to be the victim of assault, that too by an old man in white house. Here, not only young man but also old man starts to see black woman as a property.

Both Mayfield is pregnant but white Mayfield's child dies after the delivery and her husband replaces Betty's child and gives to his wife, in return he gives a fake consolation to Betty. Shange says:

Both the white and the slave wife delivered of a son the winter of 1852, but this time, it was Betty's child who died. Julius consoled her with words of rekindled love, of apology. "What would have been his fate? It is God's will," he said. "For the girls there is a place. The next one we will name Juliet. Our Jewel."
(SSSC 118)

This shows the blacks sufferings; they didn't have the liberty even to ask against the whites. Betty knows very well that her child was not dead; even then she doesn't ask anything to Julius because she knows that she will not get her child back.

One day, Tildie ask Dora to do some house work for the guests due to lack of slaves in Tildie's house, but she refuses for which she was fired from her job and send out. There was a bachelor party and she happens to be there, she is abused and raped by the men there. The narrator says:

They dragged her into a shed. Her head struck the door. She clung to the post and, groping, found a shovel handle and struck at something, him, them. Another took hold of her and pressed his walking stick onto her neck. He stripped her to the waist, clothes drawn up. She kicked and squirmed. The coke hold got tighter... (SSSC 123-124)

Dora is once again treaded bad, where white go to the extent to rape her and leave her in the street after doing so, which shows even after freedom blacks were treated critically. Black woman didn't even have the freedom to go out and enjoy their life, because there was no protection for them.

These are the incidents which express their achievements even though undergoing a hard times: “Dora had got it into her mind to be a dressmaker, to open up a store as fine as the white ladies’ on King Street, to be “une modiste,” a maker of fine women’s dresses and hats and to run a school to go with it for the young girls who had started collecting around her window when she worked. (SSSC 68) This states that Dora came with a dream of becoming a dress maker which she never give up, even when is underwent hard time she was never to give up. “I will own me a house with a privy and a front door that goes to the street. I will run a respectable business with my name on it, and people will call me Miss. This refrain ran in her head like a mantra as she wove between the seats, efficiently removing soup bowls and replenishing dinner rolls with silver tongs it had taken her twenty minutes to polish.” (SSSC 109) These lines are the strength of Dora in which she clearly states that how she wants to spend her rest of the life in Charleston, even though she didn’t have a house of her own, but she had a respectable business, through which she got prominent among the whites.

The characters in the novel fought hard to survive in American society, where black woman are considered as property from birth till their death, they never lost their courage to get victory in their life. These are the sufferings of black woman in contemporary American society portrayed in the novel. The incidents from the novel throw light on African American Tussles and Triumphs to exist in American society even after the freedom. The black woman resisted every obstacle of whites, and considered it in a positive way, to attain triumph, where they themselves move forward to make a place for them in their new society. Through these characters it is evident shows African American woman in America have learned to find humor in heartache, to see beauty in the midst of desperation and horror. They have been caregivers and breadwinners, showing incredible strength and resilience, unflinching loyalty, boundless love and affection. They have risen above centuries of oppression, after years of

dealing with society's racist and sexist misconceptions which is portrayed through the incidences in the novel.

References

Hans Ostrom and J. David Macey, Jr. editors. *The Greenwood Encyclopedia of African American Literature*, vol. 4, Greenwood Press, 2005, pp. 1486-1492.

Henry Louis Gates Jr and Nelliey Mckay. Editors. *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, vol 2, 1997, pp. 2095.

Jeffrey Lehman, Elizabeth Shaw. Editors. *Gale Encyclopedia of Multicultural America*, Gale Group, 2000, pp. 28-32.

Shange, Ntozake and Ifa Bayeza. *Some Sing, Some cry*, St Martin's Press, 2010.